

PROGRAM: hireAbility

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'ROUND THE REGION by Sharon Harris-Zlotnick

JEVS hireAbility

Learning about the world of work can be difficult, even for those with job experience and a solid support system. It is harder for those with physical, developmental or emotional challenges. They may find it almost impossible to navigate the many personal and professional aspects of employment. Thanks to [JEVS hireAbility](#), help in South Jersey is now readily available.

Founded in 1941, JEVS Human Services is among the largest private, nonprofit organizations operating throughout the Delaware Valley region. Headquartered in Philadelphia, PA, with satellite offices at Camden County College in Blackwood, JEVS maintains a local presence in Linwood. JEVS is a joint effort among federal, state and local government funding, complemented by generous private sector and charitable foundations.

More than 35,000 people, each with his or her own specific career and personal goal, are helped each year. JEVS addresses each individually by providing job skills training, career management, vocational rehabilitation and recovery services.

Career Navigator Kimberly Callahan works in the Linwood office and covers both Atlantic and Cape May Counties. Her background is in education, which includes working at the Atlantic County Special Services School. Callahan's expertise has helped her interact with clients whose special needs and disabilities make them eligible for supported employment.

She says, "I analyze a person's skills and assess an appropriate future work environment. Any- one who is a potential placement must have a desire to work. That is critical because these are real employees who are paid by the cooperating companies."

Most JEVS placements are not full-time and many clients may have supplemental income like social security or disability compensation. Callahan will help with a transition to full-time if someone wants to expand their work situation.

Some clients may need support indefinitely; others may not. It is a case-by-case assessment. JEVS provides liability insurance and, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a job coach. In

addition to finding employment, Callahan regularly coaches clients on the job site when necessary to facilitate a smooth job experience.

JEVS is also working with students to help them transition into future positions. The JEVS hireAbility [School to Work program](http://www.jevshumanservices.org/program/school-to-work/) (formerly Pre-Employment Transition Services, or Pre-ETS), prepares students in some schools to become "career ready" while analyzing their abilities and interests. This service is free for qualified students in Atlantic and Camden Counties. Some key elements of School to Work are self-advocacy training, workplace readiness training, counseling and guidance that includes post-secondary school options and classroom-based career and job exploration. For more information, see www.jevshumanservices.org/program/school-to-work/

Callahan believes that sharing the success stories is important to promoting public awareness of hiring individuals with disabilities. Here are some current profiles:

- Island Gym in Northfield hired Nick Tull in October 2017. Nick was part of the in-school Bridge to Work project that encompassed transitioning from high school services, including job development. Callahan approached co-owner Dave Dungan about hiring Nick. He immediately agreed, confirming his strong support for employing individuals with disabilities. Nick received a warm welcome and has become a regular that customers enjoy seeing on Thursdays. Customers praise him and his work ethic.



Manager Kimberle Watt said, "Nick has become such an integral part of the Island Gym community. He has seamlessly taken on his responsibilities as an employee and offers great staff support. Nick always brings his sunshine to Island's members through small conversations or a warm smile." Overcoming a communication barrier, Nick loves interacting with other employees and customers. He cleans the machines and mats, but has also assumed other responsibilities like cleaning the bikes and sweeping the studio floor.

Nick's mother, Melody Tull is thrilled. She states, "I am extremely happy that Nick enjoys going to Island Gym to work."

Island Gym also takes on interns from the School to Work program to give them real world work experience. Island Gym recently won the 2019 Outstanding Employer Award through the Atlantic County Workforce Development Board. This award recognized their dedication to empowering individuals with disabilities through employment opportunities. Check out www.islandgym.com for membership specials.

- Deb and Mark Pellegrino, owners of MADE AC in Atlantic City, hired Scott Menendez in April 2019. This unique location allows customers to watch the chocolate process go from bean to bar.

Callahan claims that the Pellegrinos approached her while she was coaching Nick Tull at the Island Gym in Northfield. Nick's hard work and community contributions impressed them. They sought a client to sort the chocolate beans. Callahan approached Scott and his family, who quickly encouraged him.



Scott's parents, Judi and George Menendez, say, "We appreciate this opportunity for Scott to work at MADE. Supported employment and a caring job coach is so important."

During Scott's "working interview," he and Callahan sorted the beans together for several hours. Both Scott and the Pellegrinos were happy with the "fit." Mark says, "We love having Scott here, he has worked out great." They often talk about their mutual love of food.

MADE AC's slogan is "From bean to bar, always MADE with love." Scott is proud that he helps bring that love to each bar of chocolate. Order a holiday basket by visiting www.madeacchocolate.com.

- Both excited and nervous, Colleen Nixon joined This and That Uniform in Pleasantville in April 2019. Callahan helped her learn to arrange the scrubs by size and style. She says Colleen originally struggled a bit, but they developed strategies to help her remember how to hang the pants and the sizing order.



Colleen loves the personal independence of working and has taken on many additional duties. She diligently strives to master each new assignment and Callahan enjoys knowing that Colleen's confidence level has increased as she completes these new tasks. "I love my job and am proud to be there. I learn new things and gain experience. I get to meet new people," says Colleen.

The staff at This and That has been kind and welcoming. Office Manager Jalisa Washington says, "We love having Colleen on our team. She works so hard every day she is here." For any uniform needs, visit www.thisandthatuniforms.com.

- The Nizam's Authentic Indian Cuisine in Egg Harbor Twp. recently hired Claressa Hill after she had seen the online help wanted advertisement. She has prior dishwashing and bussing experience from working at the Atlantic County Special Services School.

Owner Syed Abbas was willing give Claressa a try when Callahan explained that her role as job coach was to help Claressa learn her job so she could then work independently. Claressa, who loves working at The Nizam's is overcoming some struggles during the restaurant's busy times. Her job is to clear the tables and reset them for the next guests. Claressa loves The Nizam's and is proud of her work.

Abbas is positive, saying, "Claressa is trying her best. Our society should be helpful to people of all abilities. We all, especially small businesses, should do our part to help our community become accepting and diverse." To advance her skills, Claressa has taken the initiative and enrolled in JEVS [Opportunity Youth Collaborative](#). The 12-week paid training program is for out of school youth, ages 16 to 24, who have a barrier to employment. She will receive hospitality training and industry-recognized certificates.

For program information, call 856.374.4921. If you would like more information on services, please call 856.374.4921, or email hireAbility@jevs.org, or visit www.jevshireability.com.